

FY 2007 Fact Sheet

For Potential Recreational Trails Program Grant Applicants

Welcome to the Recreational Trails Program! The federal program titled, "Safe Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU) is currently funding the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) administers the RTP funds at the state level, while the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides program oversight at the federal level. The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) is a council that advises FWP on such things as RTP Program expenditures and a variety of recreational trails issues. An advisory committee such as the STAC is a federal requirement in order for Montana to be eligible for RTP funds.

RTP grant applicants (sponsors) can include federal, state, county or municipal agencies, private associations and clubs. RTP grants may not exceed 80% of the total of an individual project. This is a reimbursement program. After approval of all required documentation, FWP will reimburse the sponsor for 80% of the actual documented costs incurred. Reimbursement of RTP funds will only be approved for project expenditures incurred after the date of the signed project agreement between the project sponsor and FWP.

The goal of Montana's RTP is to distribute money to the best trail projects based upon applications that are complete and of high quality. However, the RTP Program may not be the right grants program in every case. That is why we have listed some of the more important technical and regulatory aspects of the program for your review and consideration. Please be sure you understand RTP rules and regulations **BEFORE** you begin the application process; it could save you considerable time and money.

1. **Please read all materials** before making the first mark on this RTP grant application. This will help you develop a timeline for your application to ensure you don't miss the deadlines.
2. Be sure to read the *Recreational Trails Program Guidelines*, which explains what kinds of projects are eligible, outlines RTP program priorities, and describes grant-scoring criteria.
3. Please provide the detailed descriptive information specifically applicable to the project for which you seek funding. Adequate documentation is very important, but be careful--more is not necessarily better—include only what you need and no more. Your application must convince FWP and the STAC that your project meets program criteria as identified in *Recreational Trails Program Guidelines*, is well thought out and designed, and has considered all reasonable alternatives.

4. Any applicant with an RTP grant approved prior to 2003 that has not yet completed that grant is not eligible to apply for an FY 2007 grant.
5. Maps and photographs of the site should be high quality. Photos of the project area and clear general design plans should accompany your application. Maps should include an area map of the surrounding ten miles and a site map of the immediate project area.
6. All projects must satisfy the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). If a NEPA assessment for a project on federal property has already been made, please note that a NEPA categorical exclusion does not satisfy MEPA. Each application, with the exception of categories noted in item number seven, must contain a completed MEPA/NEPA Checklist. Project effects may be either negative or positive. Use biologist's comments from the Biological Review Form as applicable. For example, displacing wildlife from a calving area or winter range is a negative impact while improving a trail to lead people away from a calving area or winter range is a positive impact. Dated MEPA NEPA Checklists and biological review forms are good for two years. If the proposed project is exactly the same as last year's (no variations whatsoever), the MEPA NEPA Checklist and biological review forms from last year may be used with this application.
7. Only the following types of projects are exempted from completion of the MEPA/NEPA Environmental Checklist: ethics or safety education brochures and portable exhibits and displays.
8. Project alternatives need to be discussed in the narrative section of the MEPA/NEPA Checklist. Provide a good discussion of the preferred project alternative and the other reasonable alternatives considered, including the required "no action" alternative. At a minimum, the discussion must include the "no action" alternative and two additional alternatives.
9. If a NEPA assessment for a project on federal property has already been made, please note: a NEPA categorical exclusion does not satisfy MEPA. Therefore, the MEPA/NEPA Checklist must be completed in all cases.
10. Sponsors should pay special attention to the public-comment requirements at the end of the MEPA/NEPA Checklist. Requirements include soliciting public input to the proposed project through a legal ad in a daily newspaper with widest circulation in the immediate project area. The legal ad must run for at least one day. The public comment period must be open for at least 30 days. Please plan your grant application schedule accordingly.
11. Please describe the pre-project status of weeds in the exact area proposed for your project and how you will monitor and control weeds on the project area during and after construction. It is not enough to simply state that the Forest Service

Ranger District, the County, or the City has a weed plan, although these are all good things to know. However, the sponsor should describe the weed status at the project site, what kind of weed encroachment the project might encourage, and what the sponsor proposes to do to stop weed encroachment. Weed control costs on a project are legitimate trail costs and the sponsor may include these as part of the grant request. Exempted projects, such as ethics or safety education brochures and portable exhibits and displays, do not require a weed plan.

12. Wildlife and Fisheries Review Forms are a necessity and must include dated signatures of a qualified agency fish and wildlife biologist (Fish, Wildlife & Parks; US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, etc.) or professional consulting biologist and must be dated within 2 years of the project application deadline. A fisheries biologist must fill out the Fisheries Review form and a wildlife biologist must fill out the Wildlife Review form. It is the reviewing biologist's responsibility to determine potential effects on fish and wildlife resources, including federally listed threatened, endangered or sensitive species. The biologist must determine the potential effects, suggest mitigations to minimize negative impacts, or suggest the project has impacts that are too great and cannot be mitigated and should not be considered. If the proposed project is exactly the same as last year's (no variations whatsoever), the MEPA NEPA Checklist and biological review forms from last year may be used with this application.
13. During the biological review, the biologist may inform the sponsor that special permits are required before FWP can award a grant. Permits, such as 310, 124 or 404, may be required for work performed in close proximity to streams, wetlands, rivers, bogs, etc. Please supply biologists with detailed project descriptions and good project area maps. We advise sponsors to have this information to biologists prior to May 13, 2006. Exempted projects, such as ethics or safety education brochures and portable exhibits and displays, do not require completed wildlife or fisheries review forms.
14. A sponsor may submit only one application per year. An application may contain more than one project phase. If the application contains more than one distinct project phase, the applicant must prioritize those phases.
15. Grant Categories. Two separate grant categories have been instituted so that grant applicants with fewer grant-writing resources and smaller projects do not have to compete directly with sponsors from larger communities. The Small Grant category comprises sponsors requesting \$20,000 or less per grant application. The Large Grant category includes sponsors requesting \$20,001 to \$35,000.
16. The maximum grant request allowed per project is \$35,000 and the grant may provide up to 80 percent of a project's total costs.
17. All projects seeking funding from the RTP must comply with existing federal, state and jurisdictional laws, regulations and ordinances.

18. According to the Federal Highway Administration, only allow a “small” portion (less than 20%) of an RTP grant can be used for planning, design or feasibility studies.
19. The sponsor must provide all information requested. The application must be postmarked by July 1, 2006! Late or incomplete applications will not be considered for funding.
20. FWP staff review and rank RTP applications with input from the State Trails Advisory Committee. Final grant approval comes from FWP. After FHWA concurrence, FWP will send the grant recipient a project agreement, which must be signed and returned by an appropriate official of the applicant organization.

If you have questions or concerns regarding any aspect of your application, please don't hesitate to call Bob Walker (444-4585) or Steve Gilbert (444-7642) of the Recreational Trails Program for advice.

